



TIPPING POINT INNOVATION BRIEF:
Girl-Led Activism and Advocacy

BANGLADESH

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CARE’s Tipping Point Initiative is a multi-country initiative addressing child marriage by focusing on its root causes through a dynamic process of innovation, insight, and influence. CARE sees child marriage as an act of violence, so we enable girls to assert their rights, help families and communities to support them, and influence policy to sustain change.

Research shows that major social change only occurs when those who have been excluded from power organize collectively in the form of social movements to challenge existing systems and their impact.^{1,2} Therefore, Tipping Point facilitates adolescent girl-led activism and structured allyship by parents and adolescent boys as girls find and collectively step into spaces to reflect on and tackle inequality.

The Road to Innovation for Girl-Led Change

In its first phase in Bangladesh (2013-2017), Tipping Point promoted girls’ rights and choices about marriage through focused engagement with groups of girls, boys, and parents. The groups critically reflected on issues related to

gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and built financial and leaderships skills alongside community-level events to promote gender-equitable social norms. And in just a few years, the project made significant progress in mobilizing advocates for girls’ rights and in shifting social norms related to child marriage in Bangladesh. Among the results:

- Girls gained psychosocial skills, knowledge of their rights, social capital, and increased confidence.
- Girls’ mobility and visibility increased significantly.
- Parent-adolescent relationships improved, and parents were less concerned with family honor.
- Strong allies for girls emerged in project villages.

However, the successes of the project did not completely overcome the many barriers girls continue to face in realizing their potential and achieving agency in key life decisions. A key challenge, and notable gap, for Tipping Point was to engage a broader range of community members and to engage parents and boys more intensively in collective action activities. Fathers and boys were more difficult to mobilize and required creative approaches to their participation.

For Phase 2 (2017-2020), Tipping Point utilized these learnings from Phase 1 to develop and test a holistic and replicable implementation package, enhancing girls' leadership and activism skills within group sessions and adapting the [EMpower](#) package, developed by the Emerging Markets Foundation, for a more structured approach to supporting girl-led movement building and social norms shifting approaches beyond individual and group levels.

The role of Tipping Point in the girls' activism is to support their success, not to guide them towards CARE's ideas, placing girls at the center of all interventions, decision-making, and evaluation. This helps ensure that the activist activities are determined by the girls' own ideas and needs. Furthermore, to address the notable gap from the projects' first phase, Tipping Point created a structured allyship component for parents and adolescent boys so that girls' allies are prepared for this role in support of girls' leadership and activism.

Girls as Activists and Advocates

By shifting the focus from girls and mentors alone to utilizing and strengthening existing relationships and structures, girls' agency increased and so too their activism. Tipping Point's innovative adaptations propelled a systemic process of girls advocating for themselves and their rights at the community level, a new movement in Bangladesh.

After 12 months of dedicated effort to support girl-led activism and movement building, Tipping Point staff saw the following:

- Girls connected with religious leaders, government officials, teachers, etc.
- Social norms programming informed by the girls to address issues such as—
 - Increased participation in decision making
 - Addressing gender norms
 - Increasing girls mobility in Sunamganj where flooding creates additional challenges
- A critical shift from individual to collective thinking
- Girls voices elevated from the community to the national level
- Built leadership capacity (CARE Tipping Point providing *mentorship* only)
- Strengthened girls' organizing skills



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Leveraging Innovation for Impact at Scale

The innovation for girl-led change seen in Phase 2 will be further catalyzed in the third phase of Tipping Point, the culmination of six years of multi-level programming and advocacy to critically engage the discourse on CEFM.

Tipping Point's implementation package rooted in challenging social expectations and repressive norms while promoting girl-led activism. Through innovation and adaptation, adolescent girls have identified and collectively stepped into spaces to reflect on and tackle inequality.

In Phase 3, Tipping Point centers girls' experiences and evidence-based strategies to facilitate transformative change by advocating – alongside girls, their allies, and the women's rights organizations that support this work – for governments and donors to recognize and be held accountable to implement and fund evidence-based policies and strategies that address the root causes of CEFM. Lastly, Phase 3 will seek to make CARE's programming more accountable to our commitment to girls' rights by investing in social norms and gender equality approaches for adolescent girls across sectors.

For more information about Girl-Led Activism and Advocacy please contact tippingpoint@care.org

Endnotes

- 1 Smith, J, and Wiest, D. (2012) Social Movements in the World-System: The Politics of Crisis and Transformation. Russell Sage Foundation.
- 2 CARE understands a movement as "an organized set of people vested in making a change in their situation by pursuing a common political agenda through collective action", as defined by the women's rights advocate and academic, Srilatha Battiwala.